



# Bush Tucker of Couran Cove Island Resort

South Stradbroke Island has a great diversity of edible plant species, some of which were eaten by Aboriginal or early European settlers. These are generally known as bush tucker. This fact sheet will discuss some of our better-known bush tucker plants and some of their uses. Our guides take regular bush tucker walks around the site to point out many of these plants. Couran Cove Island Resort's nursery and kitchens will actively be working together to ensure that some of these tasty bush tucker delicacies are on the menu. If you see these on the menu, we encourage you to try them.

It is always important to remember that only some plants are edible and some of these are only edible when treated the right way. We suggest that you only try bush tucker under the supervision of a qualified guide. It is also important to remember that these bush tucker plants are an important part of many native animal diets. If we take too much they will go hungry, so only ever take a taste not a meal. If you want more information just come to the Interpretive Centre and ask our professional guides, they are more than happy to help.

## **Native Cherry** *Exocarpos cupressiformis*

There are eight species of *Exocarpos* in Australia and the species we possess at Couran Cove Island Resort is perhaps one of the better known.

Native Cherry was first drawn to the attention of the world through French naturalist Labillardiere, who was aboard a French rescue mission on the coast of Tasmania in 1792. He compared the fruit to that of the cashew nut and named the Genus 'Exocarpos', referring to the seed on the outside. It became well known, if not notorious with the early settlers along the eastern coast, for to them it represented everything that was Australian compared to European.

They had become accustomed to 'dogs that hopped on their back legs' and 'water moles that sported duck's bills and laid eggs', so a fruit with seed on the outside didn't look all that out of place. Native Cherry has a somewhat tart taste about it and depending on your liking, may be

agreeable to the palate or nauseating. It is highly suitable for jams, however, there are only a few of these small trees available on site.

## **Warrigal Greens** *Tetragonia tetragonoides*

This plant is known under several common names such as Warrigal Cabbage and New Zealand Spinach.

It received its latter name from Captain Cook who first found it growing in New Zealand. It was later found in Australia. Tim Low (1989) provided a wonderful insight into the history of this plant's use as a food source, "Of all the plants tasted by Banks and Cook during their voyage, this 'spinach' (no relation to the real thing) made the strongest impression."



*Tetragonia tetragonoides*

Banks took seed back to England where it was grown in Kew Gardens. By the nineteenth century, New Zealand Spinach, known also as 'Botany Bay Greens', had become a popular summer spinach in England and America, appearing for sale in seed catalogues in the 1820s.

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Today, outside the bush tucker trade, few people know of this plant, even fewer recognise it and its tasty potential. The resort possesses many 'groves' of Warrigal Greens and already we have successfully cultivated it from seed and cuttings in the nursery.

**Midyim Berry** *Austromyrtus dulcis*

Midyim did not suffer the same notoriety as the Native Cherry, it being much sweeter in taste, more traditional looking and coming highly recommended by Aborigines. This seaside forest plant grows to about a metre in height with lush green and pink foliage and profuse flowering in spring.

It is common on sand areas along the eastern coast between Grafton and Fraser Island, where the small fruit provided a welcome refreshing taste to the Aborigines and early settlers alike. Being a member of the *Myrtaceae* family, it has similar aromatic oils to many of the eucalypts and melaleucas and this fragrance is often experienced in the fruit, providing a distinctly Australian taste, not unlike soft, sweet cinnamon. The fact that this is an attractive landscaping plant only adds to its appeal.

**Sandpaper Fig** *Ficus coronata*

This medium sized tree is usually found in damp conditions, along the sides of creeks – anywhere it can find a good supply of water. It received its common name due to its large leaves, which have a very rough texture like sandpaper. In fact, Aboriginal groups used the leaves to smooth down timber objects like boomerangs and spears. The main fruiting season at Couran Cove Island Resort appears to be summer and at this time, the tree is covered in cherry-sized red fruit. They can be dry and gritty or smooth and sweet depending on the parent plant. The sweeter varieties are perfect for desserts and salads. The birds and bats love them and play a vital role in the dispersal of seed throughout the forest.

**Coastal Banksia** *Banksia integrifolia*

This species is very common on-site and can be found in all vegetation types except our Livistona Rainforest and its adjacent melaleuca wetland. Banksias typically favour low nutrient conditions and it is not unusual to find them growing profusely on sand islands with a history of fires. The combination of heat and smoke from the fire help to germinate the seeds and regenerate their populations. This particular species, one of Australia's 75, produces vast quantities of nectar which can be tasted by sticking your finger into the centre of a newly opened flower or by sucking the whole flower itself. The second method comes with a word of warning, as on occasions you will find ants whose stinging formic acid does not mix too well with nectar on

the palate. Aborigines were recorded soaking the flowers in water to make a sweet drink and in some areas this was left to ferment into an alcoholic brew. It is doubtful whether enough nectar could be gathered for commercial use, however, Bush Tucker Walk participants may be able to sample a taste by soaking flowers in a glass of water.

**Blue Lillipilli** *Syzygium oleosum*

The Blue Lillipilli is one of our more common rainforest trees and produces limited quantities of small tangy fruit. Australia possesses over 60 different lillipillies, of which some are more sour and astringent, so we are lucky with *Syzygium oleosum*'s pleasant taste. Lillipillies have been used in preserves and jellies and make an excellent sauce for meats and other dishes in restaurants. This species would also be perfect for desserts and mixing through ice cream for a truly endemic Couran Cove Island Resort treat.

**Geebung** *Persoonia stradbokensis*

Geebungs were well known to Aboriginal groups in coastal areas of Australia. The foliage varies greatly from species to species, however, the long yellow tubular flowers and small round fruits remain constant. They were also well known in colonial times, as witnessed by the Geebung Polo Club in Banjo Patterson's poetry and the suburb of Geebung in Brisbane. The small green fruits have mostly a thick skin and a large seed surrounded by fibrous bland flesh. The fruits ripen upon falling to the ground, however, none are seen at Couran Cove Island Resort due to our large populations of small marsupials and rodents who relish them.



**Mistletoe**

There are over 70 different species of mistletoe in Australia, most of them with edible fruit. Whether the keen observer is tall or athletic enough to reach them is another story. In some cases, too much mistletoe can establish on a tree or a shrub and actually kill a branch or the entire plant. The distribution agent for this process is the small and colourful Mistletoe Bird (*Dicaeum hirundinaceum*). This bird's diet includes a variety of small fruits of the forest and insects, but is predominantly made up of mistletoe species when they are available. After eating the sweet fruit, the mistletoe bird has trouble removing the seed from either its beak or backside due to the extremely sticky flesh surrounding the seed.





It must then wipe these parts of it's anatomy on bark, sometimes performing what looks like an elaborate dance to remove the seed, forcing it into the bark. In this way, the mistletoe life cycle begins once more.

At Couran Cove Island Resort, we possess 7 species of mistletoe, several of which are very sweet to the palate. Many are extremely sticky as described previously and one must physically remove the seed and wipe them on something to be rid of them.

**Orange Mangrove** *Bruguiera gymnorhiza*

Couran Cove Island Resort possesses several different species of mangrove trees that have edible fruit after careful preparation. Living in such a saline environment, the seedpods are often germinated prior to being dropped from the tree and many develop toxins or tannins to stop animals eating them.



*Bruguiera gymnorhiza*

Tim Low's book, *Bush Tucker* (1992), recalled the interesting story of Barbara Thompson who was shipwrecked on Prince of Wales Island in the 1840s. She lived for four years with the islanders, the staple of her diet being the seeds of these orange and grey mangroves.

They were eaten after lengthy preparation involving pounding, soaking, sifting and baking to remove the astringent tannins. Eating these pods raw could be poisonous. Low reported that Orange Mangrove pods were soaked in basin

shaped holes in the beach sand and such holes were a characteristic sight along the coasts of Cape York Peninsula last century. We are unable to harvest the pods of these plants for culinary use as all mangrove trees are now protected.

**Pigface** *Carpobrotus glaucescens*

There are six species of pigface found in Australia and the variety we possess on South Stradbroke Island produces one of the finest of native Australian fruit.

Following the yellow centred, mauve flowers is a deep red fruit with two small horns on top of its thick skin. Its taste is uniquely Australian and must be personally experienced to be appreciated.



*Carpobrotus glaucescens*

It has been likened, in many documents to taste like 'salty strawberries', but this doesn't quite do it justice.

Its main fruiting season is in the summer and Aboriginal groups used to feast on the fruit at this time of year. Unfortunately, due to the large population of wallabies and their diet which includes Pigface, there is little to be found on South Stradbroke Island.

In fenced areas where the wallabies are unable to enter, the Pigface is growing well. It is helping to bind the sand, so as to prevent erosion and provide cultural and aesthetic appeal to the landscaping. When grown in large enough numbers the fruit could be used to produce a range of desserts and preserves.



**Native Ginger** *Alpinia caerulea*

This plant is quite uncommon on-site due to the edible leaves being eaten by our wallaby population and perhaps some pilfering in the past. The small blue fruits are present during the autumn months and are very tangy with a sometimes-astringent taste. The seeds within are hard to separate from the stringy flesh, so its use as a restaurant item is very doubtful. Never the less, the taste is worthwhile experiencing and the plant is quite beautiful in appearance.



*Alpinia caerulea*

We will endeavour to use some in our landscaping on-site so that we might include it in our Bush Tucker Walks.

Couran Cove Island Resort has a wealth of bushtucker plants to be found in and around the resort. If you can join one of our Bush Tucker Walks, you will get to learn more about these plants and maybe even get to taste some real Australian food.

*Botanical Illustrations by Louise Sanders®*

